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Thoughts on a SDA Theology of Ordination

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THOUGHTS ON A SDA THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

A Paper
Presented to the General Conference
Role of Women Commission

by
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THOUGHTS ON A SDA THEOLOGY OF ORDINATION

INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has ordained its ministers even before the official organization and adoption of a name.¹ Yet, as Dr. Raoul Dederen rightfully remarks, "we have no elaborate doctrine of the ordination to the ministry."²

This paper cannot promise what it cannot deliver, i.e. a comprehensive SDA theology of ordination.³ Its purpose is mainly to raise some relevant questions and to cultivate an ongoing discussion within the church. The basic question of this essay is: What is ordination? We propose to look for the answer by dealing with several subordinate questions, namely: Who should be ordained? Who should ordain? What happens at ordination? and finally, Why ordination?

This further refinement of a Seventh-day Adventist theology

¹The need for ordination did not arise before the 1850's, since several pioneers had already been ordained in the denominations where formerly they were members. Ordination among Adventists may have taken place as early as 1851 or 1852, however, the records on the ordination of J.N. Andrews, A.S. Hutchins and C.W. Sprey at New Haven, Vermont in 1853 provide the first reliable report of ordination within Adventism.

²Dederen, Raoul. "A Theology of Ordination" special insert in Ministry, February, 1978. pg. 24.M.

³We must recognize the noteworthy contributions of Raoul Dederen, Thomas Blincoe, and others to the development of a Seventh-day Adventist theology of ordination, thus a conscious effort has been made not to duplicate their excellent studies. See Dederen, R. Ibid. and Blincoe, Thomas "Need - a Theology of Ordination" Ministry. February 1978, pp. 22-24.

of ordination stems from a definite set of a priori presuppositions which may be summarized conveniently as follows:

1. The expression "theology of ordination" is understood here quite literally as that which God ($\Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$) has said ($\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) about ordination.

2. The implication is that God has spoken. His will has been expressed with both words and acts. These two modes of "speaking" were purposeful and not haphazard, opening to the searcher the opportunity to find their undergirding principles and guidelines.

3. The word of God is eternal. This means that its binding authority is for all times and places in keeping with the concept of eternity. What is eternal is never old, out of style, nor irrelevant.

4. Silence is not a word or message from God and therefore it cannot be authoritative for doing theology.¹

5. The culture of the Biblical times did not deter, distort, nor silence God's word. If He had something to say that was shocking or offensive to the culture, He found a way to communicate it. Moral truth always has priority over social mores. (See for example, John 4:5-39, especially vs. 27.)

6. Divine revelation defines the parameters of Christian theology. It is both a point of departure and a subsequent guide

¹Selected Messages, Vol. I pg. 16. "No man can improve the Bible by suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said." Only definite divine statements are a trustworthy foundation for doing theology.

in the process of thinking. Human wisdom, theological traditions, or a social context cannot replace His word.¹

As the church continues its ministry in this world and as we respoⁿto the challenges of our time, the basic questions of ordination deserve our attention.

¹Testimonies, Vol. 8 pg. 192.

THE CONCEPT OF ORDINATION

The Bible has no one specific word used consistently or exclusively for ordination to ministry. Even the Greek word which is translated by the Latin ordo, ordinare - the root of the English word "ordain" - conveys a variety of meanings other than ordination to ministry.¹ Yet the Bible is not silent on this subject. Numerous expressions and events provide us with a rich background of information on the meaning of ordination. The earliest event recorded that definitely describes such a ceremony is found in Leviticus 8 and 9. Aaron and his sons undergo an elaborate liturgy in the presence of the people before they begin their priesthood. The ceremony is not named, yet the second ram is called the "Lamb of ordination," (Lev 8:22, RSV, NIV) or "consecration" (KJV). The word used is mala מלא meaning to "initiate," to "inaugurate."

The laying on of hands is perhaps the most frequent expression used in the context of ordination.²

In Num 8:10 the whole congregation of Israel lays hands on the

¹In Luke 1:8, it stands for a systematic arrangement of ideas. In 1 Cor 14:40 the term means "orderliness" (in a public worship). In Heb 5:6-10, 6:20, 7:11, 7:21, it refers to the "orders" of Aaronic and Melchisedechian priesthood.

²The laying on of hands is by no means a reserved terminology for the act of ordination. The hands were laid (Hebrew samach and Greek ἐπιθεῖς τὰς χεῖρας) on the heads of sacrificial animals (Lev 8:14), for the blessing (Gen 49:14, Matt 19:15), in the context of baptism, (Acts 8:14-17, 19:1-7), and on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21).

Levites. Moses is instructed by God to lay his hands on Joshua (Num 27:18-23) and thus commission him as his successor. In the New Testament, the same expression is used in the service of ordination in Acts 6:6, 13:3, 14:23, 2 Cor 8:19, 1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6.

Some additional terms have been used for ordination. To "anooint" (maschach) (Ex 28:40-42; 29:1-46; 30:22-33) refers to the consecration of the priests, Levites, and later the kings (1 Sam 10:1, 16:13) and prophets (Isa 61:1). The New Testament proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed One.¹ Other New Testament passages appear less descriptive. Jesus simply "made" (ἐποίησεν) apostles (Mark 3:14) or "appointed" or "set them aside" (ἐθίκα , John 15:16) and Titus was to "appoint" (καταστήσας) elders in Crete. (Titus 1:5)

This variety of expressions and words used conveys the richness of the concept of ordination. Yet, the very wealth of expressions presents both advantages and disadvantages for whoever attempts a theology of ordination.

The benefits consist of a multicolored and multidimensional picture that one can compose. It makes it evident that a concept of ordination need not be based on one statement or a single event in Scripture.

The difficulties cannot be overlooked either. The

¹Anointing had many other uses. The tabernacle and utensils were anointed. In the New Testament, anointing is not mentioned for ordination, but for post-baptismal commissioning (1 John 2:20), or for the sick (James 5:14), etc.

interpretation and application can be problematic. From a very elaborate ceremony, as in the case of the priests and Levites, carefully depicted in the O.T. we are led to a very simple statement in the New Testament references. Should we understand these differences as a development from a complex to a simple liturgy? Or ought we to consider all of the different forms as equally valid, presenting to us a freedom to choose? The implications of these questions go deeper than a simple matter of procedure. One wonders whether the change of form brings with it the change of the meaning of ministry itself. Form must express adequately the content. If being a minister means holding a professional function and nothing more, a simple event would be fitting. If, however, the minister is more than an officer of the church, and if ordination is more than a form of election and inauguration, how should we express this in harmony with Scripture?

A similar question concerns the prerogative for ordination. Is it the function of a particular official as is the case of Moses ordaining Joshua, or is it the responsibility of the congregation as in the case of the Levites? Or should both the congregation and the appointed leaders participate in this important ceremony? Clearly, ordination is a Biblically-based teaching, but a careful study is needed to determine the exact form and content.¹

Before we address the basic questions outlined in the

¹See Dederen, R. Ibid.

introduction, we will suggest a working definition of ordination. One could safely propose that ordination is a DIVINE ORDINANCE AND A FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH, WHEN, GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD, IT PROCEEDS TO PUBLICLY SET APART A CERTAIN PERSON (OR PERSONS) FOR SPECIAL SERVICE AND MINISTRY. IT IS AN ACT OF CONSENT OF THE CHURCH WHICH DELEGATES AN AUTHORIZATION TO AN INDIVIDUAL IN VIEW OF THE EXERCISE OF THE ROLES IT DEEMS NECESSARY FOR ITS TOTAL WELFARE.

WHO SHOULD BE ORDAINED

A legitimate question which arises from the outset is: Who is the possible candidate for ordination? The Scriptural account points to several criteria.

1. The "Earthen Vessel" Criterion

The first answer to the question, -who is a possible candidate?-must be a negative one. No one human being is fit for such a service. This is a unanimous testimony of those who precede us. Moses' curriculum vitae includes such statements as: "Who am I?", "I am not eloquent", "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person" (Ex 3:11-13, 4:10-13); Isaiah's first reaction was: "Woe is me" (Is 6:5); Jeremiah claimed immaturity (Jer 1:6); and Paul exclaims, "who is sufficient for these things!" (2 Cor 2:16). We humans are only earthen vessels and only when we know and identify with this can we be useful (2 Cor 4:7).¹

Several implications claim our attention here.

- It seems very inappropriate for anyone to consider ordination as a right or a due.²

- It is equally dangerous to use ordination as a reward or the refusal to grant ordination as a vengeance.

¹See also 1 Sam 9:21

²One can remember letters written to conference officials "reminding" them of "qualifications" gained and "requirements" met, by the prospective interns. While no one should need a reminder, no one should feel free to request ordination either.

- In the same way, ordination is not an accolade nor a medal. The apostle Paul frequently refers to his calling to apostleship as a grace (Gal 1:15-17, 2 Cor 4:1) shown to him not because of his qualifications, but in spite of the utter lack of them. It is the surprise of an impossible burden laid upon the shoulders of humans, but also and at the same time the promise of sufficient graces for the task at hand.¹

2. The "Call" Criterion²

The Bible presents God as a "calling God." In the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:9), in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 12:1), at the burning bush (Ex 3:4), in Egypt (Hosea 11:1), and throughout human history (Matt 23:37-39) God is calling people to himself. No child of God is therefore a self-appointed member of this family. Every Christian is a person who has heard the call and responded positively to it.

This call is based upon at least three reasons. First, God's call is a call to salvation, summoning us from darkness into his marvelous light. He saves. Without this calling, we would wander to and fro. But when we follow the voice, we find security inside the fold. God's call is an invitation for us to leave the outside and come in. (1 Pet 2:9,10, John 10:3,4).

The second reason for this general call is service -

¹See Desire of Ages, pg. 436, Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 154, 155.

²See R. Dederen op. cit. pg. 24 for further discussion on the subject of calling.

diakonia.¹ This ministry is both inwardly and outwardly directed. With the call to service, the Spirit supplies us the knowledge and the necessary power. Every need within or without the church bounds is matched with a gift of the Spirit. As a result, every member is needed for service to the needs of other members, and at the same time his needs are served too.

Paul clearly states that the diversity of the gifts is not for creating distinctions, but on the contrary for unity through interdependence.

"Paul is addressing all believers when he says "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." Eph 4:1. After listing apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (in historical order), Paul again stresses unity. The goal of all gifting of such people is unity within the body."²

R. Dederen concludes:

"The ministry, therefore, is not an order of men religiously different from those who are supposedly "Laymen." It is not even a special group of persons. The ministry is a function of the whole church... The ministry of the church is its obligation under God to minister as His servant, in reconciling the world to God."³

If every church member is called to be a priest (1 Peter 2:9), does this mean that there are no other calls?⁴ Not so

¹See Clowney, Edmund P. Called To The Ministry. Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1964.

²Warkentin, Marjorie. Ordination. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982. pg. 170.

³Dederen, R. op. cit.

⁴This question merits a more complete treatment which we will attempt later in this paper.

indeed. The third call, unlike the first two calls is not a general one, but a specialized call to ministry through a genuine summons by God. From among those who are called to be disciples of Christ in his church certain individuals receive a special burden and become convinced of a summons.¹ Paul testifies: "Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." (1 Cor 9:16. See also 1 Tim 1:12). This call to special ministry becomes stronger than humans. "If I say I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot." (Jer 20:9. See also Amos 3:8).

God does not in any way violates human freedom when he calls. On the contrary, the fact that He calls implies a chance to turn a deaf ear, or to run to Tarshish rather than Nineveh. The feeling of "necessity" is not an external coercive force, but rather an internal change of identity. One sees oneself as increasingly grasped by a sense of urgency to become one with the preaching of the gospel.

3. The Reputation Criterion

This criterion has hardly any need of elaboration. A good reputation is what Paul is speaking about in 1 Tim 3:2-7. Ellen White speaks of this in the following way:

¹Strong, A. Systematic Theology. Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1976. pg. 919.

"Ministers of God should be of good repute, capable of discreetly managing an interest after they have aroused it. We stand in great need of competent men who will bring honor instead of disgrace upon the cause which they represent."¹ (1 Tim 4:12, Tit 1:5-16)

4. The Fitness Criterion

A life work with human souls requires training to acquire additional skills; it calls for a breadth of knowledge and culture and a depth of spirit and mind.

"A great injury is often done our young men by permitting them to commence to preach when they have not sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures to present our faith in an intelligent manner. Some who enter the field are mere novices in Scripture. In other things also they are incompetent and inefficient. Young men who wish to prepare for the ministry are greatly benefited by attending our colleges."²

"Training in rigorous thinking and self discipline are a must for the work in ministry. It is a lamentable fact that the advancement of the cause is hindered by the dearth of educated laborers. Many are wanting in moral and intellectual qualifications. They do not tax their mind, they do not dig for the hidden treasure. Because they only skim the surface, they gain only that knowledge which is to be found upon the surface."³

"Study to show thyself approved... " or as the RSV puts it, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved.... rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Tim 2:15)

¹Testimonies Vol. 4 pg. 407. We can only refer the reader to G.W. pp. 111-146 for the additional elaboration on the qualifications for ministry. It is evident that no one can boast of fitting this ideal picture at the time of ordination. Yet, a good reputation will indicate a noticeable measure of the presence of essential qualities, and potential for growth.

²Testimonies, Vol. 4 pp. 405, 406.

³Gospel Workers, pp. 93, 94.

This selective list of "criteria" for ordination is summarized by John Wesley in the following way: "Inquire of applicants [for ordination to the ministry]:

a. "Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? And are they holy in all manner of conversation?

b. Have they gifts, as well as grace for the work? Have they a clear sound understanding? Have they a right judgment in the things of God? Have they a just conception of salvation by faith? And has God given them any degree of utterance? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

c. Have they fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin and converted to God by their preaching?"¹

5. The Church Criterion

The knowledge and even an inner conviction of being called to ministry is not a final, nor a self-sufficient, criterion for ordination. In fact, there is no such a thing as a call to ordination; there is only a call to ministry. This can be to a private, semi-private, part-time, or full-time ministry. Yet, on the basis of an inner conviction no one can claim a right to ordination.

The same is true with all other criteria mentioned here. A good reputation is expected from every member of the church body (Eph. 4:1; Phil 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12). The training in

¹Strong, A. op. cit. pg. 920.

the Bible and leadership are not only in view of ordination, but in view of better ministry of the church. Even humility and a self-effacing character do not create in and of themselves the "permit" for ordination. Beyond all of these is the voice of the church.¹ Ministry happens within the church. It is important that those who are led, have an important word to say about those who lead. Our personal convictions and feelings have a way of being subjective. The church will listen to these convictions and feelings, yet it might not call somebody to a full-time pastoral ministry. It may see and feel otherwise.

The church may even see evidence of spiritual gifts necessary for pastoral work and not invite someone to service. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear outstanding lay preachers, lay teachers, and lay evangelists. Ordination is not imperative for receiving any of the gifts of the Spirit nor is a possession of any of them a necessary condition for ordination. In Romans 12:3-8, Paul indicates that it is faith which predisposes one for the reception of a gift. On the other hand, the same Paul recognizes his call as a sheer grace of God (1 Cor 15:8-10; Gal 1:12-17), not a natural consequence of "meeting the criteria." As the church is ministered to and becomes convinced that a certain individual is Christ-like in his service, it may reach a consensus to place the seal of approval on such a person by ordination.

¹We recognize a certain overlapping between this portion and the whole of the next section. Yet, we consider this necessary because of a different emphasis.

6. The Word Criterion

But the authority of the church is not final nor canonical. The church should be listening to the word of God before it acts or decides.

"God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of majority - not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "thus saith the Lord" in its support."¹

As we shall see further, the ordination to ministry is a very important teaching of the Scripture. Only God has authority over it, and only He calls. The church should advance and seek reformation, but any modifications of the doctrine of ordination should seek "a plain thus saith the Lord" in its support. Therefore, when faced with the question of "who should be ordained," it should first clear the way through the Word and only then consider other criteria. This is a unique Seventh-day Adventist modus operandi, and may it remain so.

¹Great Controversy, pg. 595. (Emphasis mine). I feel that God is concerned not only with doctrines, but with the church policies as well.

WHO SHOULD ORDAIN?

The question of the prerogative for administering the rite of ordination has several important facets. First, what is the source of the church's authority and its nature? Second, what is the source and the nature of the church's ministry? These two questions determine a third one-what is the proper relationship of the office of ministry to the church, and its members?

In the Catholic tradition of the Christian church the function of ordaining belongs, under normal circumstances to a bishop, and other priests who are present.¹ The consecration of a bishop is performed by three bishops who impose hands and pray.² There are several theological reasons cited in favor of this prerogative.

1. "The fullness of pastoral power and authority is given to the bishops. They are the priests of the church."³ In their office Jesus Christ resides within the church.⁴

¹There are reports of priests and abbots, who were not bishops, administering the sacrament of orders in the Middle Ages and the 17th Century. Hans Küng thinks that the Vatican II Council remained "undogmatic about this question." Hans Küng, The Church. New York: Image Books, 1976. pg. 549. See also A New Catechism. New York: Herder & Herder, 1967. pp. 361-363.

²A New Catechism. Pg. 363.

³Ibid. pg. 360.

⁴Rahner, Karl. The Priesthood. New York: Herder & Herder, 1973. pg. 103.

2. Ordination is sacramental in nature.¹ What this means mainly is that ordination "confers power over the sacred, that is, power to administer the other sacraments."²

3. The bishop alone holds this power because he is the successor of the apostles.³ In that sense, ordination is the function of Jesus performed in and by the bishop. Thus shepherding and sanctifying of the church is made possible.

The Biblical account of the ordination of Aaron and his sons, the ordination of Joshua, and that of the apostles presents a pattern of single individuals who officiated in ordination - Moses and Jesus respectively. The passage in Titus 1:5 is not clear as to who administered the rite. The other passages on ordination seem to present a different scenario. Instead of one individual alone officiating, the whole congregation participates. In the ordination of the Levites (Num 8:1-26) Moses, Aaron and the congregation; in Acts 6:2-6 the apostles and the multitude of church members; in Acts 13:1-3 again the church is involved; Titus was "appointed by the churches" (2 Cor. 8:19); and in the case of Timothy, a council of elders officiated (1 Tim 4:14), and Paul himself (2 Tim 1:6).

¹Sacraments are defined as both "signs and instruments of our salvation." They sanctify men and make them fruitful in worship and acts of charity. See Pierini, Franco. Catechism of Vatican II. New York: Alba House, 1967. pg. 129.

²McKenzie, John L. The Roman Catholic Church. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969. pg. 164.

³McKenzie, John. Dictionary of the Bible. New York: Macmillan, 1965. pg. 754.

Resting on these Biblical examples, the reformed churches diverge from the Roman Catholic pattern and follow the canons of the Council of Laodicea. The participation of the laity may take varied forms in different churches, but the role of the church is deemed indispensable.¹

There are several theological reasons for this.

1. The first and the most important theological concept has to do with the locus of authority in the church. Since the theory of apostolic succession was ruled out, the Protestant churches recognized the body of the church as the highest ecclesiastical authority.² The church was given the authority to forgive or retain sins when under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23). In matters of discipline, the final step is to "tell it to the church" (Matt 18:17). In the words of Hans Küng:

"Who then are the followers of the apostles?... There can only be one basic answer: the church. The whole church, not just a few individuals, is the follower of the apostles....The authorized mission of the apostles has been handed on to the church which the apostles ministered to."³

¹Allmen, von, J.J. Le Saint Ministère. Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1968. pg. 46. Within protestantism, one can observe several usages. On the one side, a more congregationalist approach requires the local church and an "ordination council" to be involved in the examination of candidates and recommendations for ordination, the church having decisive word. (See Strong, A. *ibid.* pg. 920, 921). The Helvetic Confession on the other hand calls for one minister, representing the church (See Allmen von, *ibid.* pg. 50) to officiate at the ceremony.

²Strong, A. *Ibid.* pg. 920.

³Küng, Hans. The Church. *op. cit.* pg. 457.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes this responsibility laid on her. "God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will."¹

In practice, the Seventh-day Adventist Church rightfully seeks to avoid extremes of appropriating or delegating the whole authority. The authority of ordination remains with God. As Christians cannot call themselves into the fellowship of disciples, so ministers cannot call themselves into the service. (John 15:16).² "In the days of the apostles the ministers of God did not dare to rely upon their own judgment in selecting or accepting men to take the solemn and sacred position of mouthpiece for God."³ The first step in selecting belonged to God. The church was the second in legitimizing and recognizing the call of God to a particular man. God

"instructed the church by revelation to set them (Paul and Barnabas) apart publicly to the work of the ministry....Both Paul and Barnabas had already received their commission from God Himself, and the ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification. It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office, and a recognition of one's authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God."⁴

The church has the power and authority to ordain, but not

¹Gospel Workers, pg. 443.

²See Dederen, Raoul. op. cit. pg. 24 L.

³Testimonies, Vol. 4 pg. 406.

⁴Gospel Workers, pg. 442.

over ordination. That power and authority is delegated to her as a church. She is not the source of it. Therefore, she should not consider herself qualified for innovations nor for digressions from the scriptural pattern. As a depository of a delegated authority, the church need not assume freedom to change form or content which go beyond Biblical form and content, lest it begins to act as a fountainhead rather than a channel.¹

2. Faithful to the Biblical witness, the SDA church may continue with the practice where ordained ministers officiate at the service, as long as we keep in mind that no ordained individual possesses the authority to do it. If God holds authority over ordination, and if the church has the authority to ordain, the ordained minister can possess authorization to officiate at ordination. When he does administer the rite, he functions as a church member not in spite of or above the church. "Though the ordained ministry is distinctive, it is exercised in the context of the church and cannot, so to speak, go it alone."²

"I saw that God had laid upon his chosen ministers the duty of deciding who was fit for the holy work; and in union with the church and the manifest tokens of the Holy Spirit, they were to

¹Scriptural pattern shows enough variations for creativity within Biblically set perimeters. The Roman Catholic church believes she can afford more freedom being shepherded by the very successor of Peter, holding authority of God on earth. Those who reject a power of Pontifex Maximus cannot do the same as those who accept it. One cannot both reject apostolic succession and assume apostolic powers.

²Macquarrie, John. Theology, Church and Ministry. New York: Crossroad, 1986. pp. 158, 159

decide who should go and who were unfit to go."¹

There is no ministry outside the church, nor can the church be complete without its ministry. In matters which belong to God alone, the church must listen obediently to God's voice in harmony with Scripture.

This is why the ceremony of ordination included of necessity, prayer and fasting in the New Testament church. When the church's recognition of the call harmonizes with the individual's sense of duty, the church then still needs God's leading.

"In the days of the apostles the ministers of God did not dare to rely upon their own judgment in selecting or accepting men to take the solemn and sacred position of mouthpiece for God. They selected the men who their judgment would accept, and then they placed them before the Lord to see if He would accept them to go forth as His representatives. No less than this should be done now."²

¹Testimonies, Vol. 1 pg. 209

²Testimonies, Vol. 4 pg. 406.

WHAT HAPPENS AT ORDINATION?

What are the effects of the ordination rite? What impact does it have on the minister? How different is an ordained person from the lay person?

1. Indelible Character?

In the Catholic view of ordination, the priest's identity is affected by the rite. He is "signed with a special character,"¹ which is indelible. "Once ordained a priest, a man remains a priest forever."²

Protestant churches have largely rejected this view. Both Zwingli³ and Calvin dismissed the sacramental change "comme si un homme estant fait prestre, deuenoit nouvelle creature."⁴ Yet, for Calvin, at ordination the candidate did receive a spiritual imprint.⁵ The prayer and laying on of hands exposed the candidate to the influence of the Holy Spirit in a special way thus equipping him with gifts necessary for his ministry.⁶ This

¹Pierini, Franco. Catechism of Vatican II. Ibid. pg. 137.

²Lawler, Ronald. et all eds. The Teaching of Christ. , A Catholic Catechism for Adults. Huntington: O.S.V., 1976. pg. 441.

³Zwingli, Ulrich. Austegung und Begründung der Schlussreden. Zwingli Hauptschriften Vol. IV. Zürich: 1952. pp. 246-248.

⁴Calvin, Jean. De la Vrasye facon de reformer L'Eglise chrestienne. Anduze: 1881. pg. 177.

⁵Institutions de la religion chrestienne. Paris: 1957-1963. IV. pp. 20, 31.

⁶Allmen, J.J. op. cit. pp. 48, 54. 134 footnote # 53.

endowment makes ministry a permanent call.¹

Among Baptists some hold that ordination "empowers" a pastor to administer ordinances,² but most deny any change based on ordination. For A. Strong it is only a formal recognition and authorization.³

The Seventh-day Adventist theology stands closer to this latter view: "The ceremony of the laying on of hands added no new grace or virtual qualification."⁴ "The New Testament gives no indication of an ordination that provides spiritual or official gifts that are otherwise unobtainable."⁵ The Holy Spirit sheds His gifts upon the church as He wills and cannot be fettered by, nor dependent on, ceremonies or offices.

No, it would be difficult to conclude from the Scriptural evidence that a permanent character, an imprint which changes the candidate either essentially or existentially, occurs at ordination.

2. Mediatorial Powers?

According to the Catholic teachings, the ordained priest becomes a means of contact with Christ and a mediator of forgiving and sanctifying grace through the power to effectuate

¹Ibid. pg. 53.

²McNutt, W.R. Polity and Practise in Baptist Churches. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1935. pp. 80, 81.

³Strong, A. Ibid. pg. 920.

⁴The Acts of the Apostles. pp. 161, 162.

⁵Dederen, R. op. cit. 24 N.

the sacrifice of the mass.¹

The arguments against this sacerdotal view of ministry are very well-known. Once one rejects the eucharistic celebration of the mass and denies the character of propitiation to it, the essential mediatorial, priestly function is denied.² Calvin would accept the offering of thanksgiving and offerings of praise at the Holy Communion as legitimate.³ Christians are urged to offer intercessory prayers, because, in fact, the priesthood is not limited to the Old Testament nor to a group of individuals in the Catholic churches. 1 Peter 2:9 indicates that every member is a priest. Every Christian now has direct access to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16), and this free access is not limited by nationality, social status, or sex (Gal 3:28).

There is but one mediator of forgiving and sanctifying grace, namely Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). He has offered, once for all, the atoning sacrifice for His people (Heb 10:19-25 and 9:28). Now "all Christians together constitute a priestly body whose business is to be the medium or expression of Christ's priesthood, to declare the message of this reconciliation between God and man achieved through Him."⁴ Women and men in the church

¹Lawler, R. op. cit. pg. 453. See also Schillebeeckx, Edward. The Mission of the church. New York: Seabury, 1973. pg. 176.

²Allmen, J.J. Ibid. pg. 58.

³Institutions IV. pp. 17, 18.

⁴Hanson, Richard. Christian Priesthood Examined. London: Lutterworth Press, 1979. pg. 26.

share in and compose the priestly function. No special ordination rite beyond baptism is needed, and no special privileged classes admissible.

If a minister is as much a priest with or without ordination, then what else would justify the rite?

3. Leadership Powers?

As the fruit of his ordination, the priest's life experiences "a special inward and existential orientation towards Christ and towards the community of believers."¹ He is placed in the line of succession with the apostles and Jesus through the college of bishops. The priest becomes "another Christ" and "to disregard the teachings of the priest is to disregard God."² He participates in the shepherding role conferred on Peter when he received the keys of the kingdom. This role consisted of ruling and guiding the church³ and is expressed today through the infallible teaching and leadership of the magisterium.

There are several points which merit separate, but brief, treatment here.

That Peter was promised the keys of the kingdom is evident from the gospel account (Matt 16:19). That the word "keys" implies authority is also evident elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 11:52, Rev 1:18, 3:17, 9:1, 20:1). We cannot elaborate

¹Schillebeeckx, E. Ibid.

²Lawler, R. Ibid. pg. 440.

³Ibid. pg. 202.

here on the meaning of the keys;¹ we can only indicate that Protestant churches have seen in this the spiritual authority to preach the gospel and exercise church discipline. But both of these powers need to be exercised not only by one individual in isolation nor by an elite group within the church. The whole church has received the commission to preach (Matt 28:19, 20) and the whole body of disciples present, were to bind or loose (Matt 18:18) in harmony with what "shall have been" done in heaven.² The key is the harmony with heaven and not the independent will of any human agent(s).

But where do these powers have their origin? Is it at ordination that the priest enters in the line of succession and thus rests on the apostolic power? While the concept of an ontological transmission of power from one bishop to another in an unbroken line seems less credible, the succession idea is not altogether rejected in Protestantism.³ The apostolicity of the church and the legitimacy of its ministry are important factors for every Christian church, and some form of contact with the original New Testament church is coveted by most.

In the ecclesiology of the reformed church the concept of

¹Grudem, W.A. "Keys of the Kingdom" in Elwell, W.A. ed. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984. pp. 604, 605.

²The unusual Greek verb construction (periphrastic future perfect) in both Matt 16:19 and 18:18 is translated inadequately by a simple future in our versions.

³Allmen, J.J. Ibid. pp. 193, 194. On the 30th of May, 1540, Calvin wrote to Farel expressing his worries about the ministers who would succeed them.

succession has three functions.

a. It affirms the permanent nature of the church. Throughout the ages, God has led His church by His ministers as He is doing now.

b. Most importantly, succession means the proclamation of the pure apostolic doctrine. This is where the life of the church comes from.¹

c. Finally, and totally dependent on the precedent point, the authenticity of the church rests on the right administration of the sacraments, and on the identification of the nature of its ministry with the original New Testament paradigm.²

This is the fruit of the spiritual imprint on the minister received at ordination. He leads the church on the path of succession from the apostles and Jesus, thanks to the graces received. The key here is the minister's unity with the message of Scripture.

4. Power to Administer Sacraments?

In the Catholic Church as in most of the Christian churches, ordination opens the door for the administering of all the sacraments in the church.³ In what way is an ordained person "qualified" for this function? The Apostolic Constitution states:

¹Ibid. pp. 195-197.

²Ibid. See below on the powers to administer sacraments.

³The view of the nature of sacraments does vary, but this is not an immediately relevant issue here.

"Neither do we permit the laity to perform any of the offices belonging to the priesthood as for instance the sacrifice, nor baptism, nor the laying on of hands, nor the blessing whether the smaller or greater... For such sacred offices are conferred by the laying on of hands of the bishop. But a person to whom such an office is not committed but he seizes upon it for himself, he shall undergo the punishment of Uzziah.¹

Even churches who do not hold ordination to be sacramental do claim that it is the precondition for officiating at the table of the Lord and at baptism.

Cyprian stated that at ordination an ordinant receives a special revelation of the Holy Spirit which gives him authority to administer sacraments.²

Kelly suggests that in the Byzantine theology and practice, the priests act as those who can mediate mysteries. This would imply that ordination functions as an initiation to these mysteries.³

In Reformed circles the authority to administer sacraments issues from the minister's authority to preach the Word. The spiritual imprint renders him worthy of presiding over sacraments.⁴ Luther said:

"Public ministry of the Word, I hold, by which the mysteries of God are known ought to be established by holy ordination as the highest and greatest of the

¹Apostolic Constitutions III. 10:6-7. Apostolic Constitutions is a collection of ecclesiastical law dating from the latter half of the 4th Century.

²Warkentin, M. op. cit. pg. 39.

³Kelley, J.N.D. Early Christian Doctrines. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978. pg. 65.

⁴Warkentin. op. cit. pp. 57, 62.

functions of the church."¹

The ordination rite, then, functions as a public authorization in addition to relying on the authority of preaching the Word. Similar views are prevalent in the contemporary statements on ordination.²

5. Nothing Good at all?

Not all opinions on ordination assume that it makes sense to ordain. Marjorie Warkentin, for example, wrote a book in which she argues against ordination and claims support for her view in both Bible and history. The following is the summary of her arguments.

a. "The laying on of hands in Old Testament always symbolizes a real transfer from one person to another, with the thing transferred depending on the occasion."³ In the new Testament the Holy Spirit descended upon those who received imposition of hands. The danger of manipulation of the rite appears early with Simon Magus (Acts 8:17-21) and can be expected to reoccur if it is used as a routine "installation into an office in the church." The passages in the Acts refer to baptism, not to ordination, and those of the ordination of Timothy should be viewed in the light of Moses' ordination of Joshua as being unique and once-for-all situations. We have no

¹Luther, Martin. Works. XL St. Louis: Concordis, 1973. pg. 11.

²Strong, A. op. cit. pg. 920. See also R.S. Wallace "Sacrament" in Elwell, A.W. op. cit. pg. 965.

³Ibid. pg. 9.

grounds for ordaining by laying on of hands based on the New Testament witness-so concludes Warkentin.¹

b. The unity of the church is seriously jeopardized with the practice, argues the author. "Mutual discernment of gifts among believers became unnecessary" because now the "professional christian" member does it all, can do it all, knows it all. Ordination sets people aside and erects barriers where none should exist.²

c. As a result of this setting aside, a very tempting relationship pattern almost imposes itself: a hierarchical pattern of relationship. Christ expressively forbids hierarchical relationships among his followers.³ (Matt 20:25, 26) Even overseers have been set in the church, not over the church (Acts 20:28).

d. "The creation of a privileged class of believers presents a danger to the priesthood of all believers and to the mediatorship of Christ."⁴

e. Even a representative view of ministry betrays sacerdotalism. "The line between representation and mediation is very fine indeed." As soon as somebody speaks or represents somebody he is invested with powers more than his own, he has a

¹Ibid. pg. 29, 156.

²Ibid. pg. 105. 187.

³Ibid. pg. 170.

⁴Ibid. p.g 179-181.

superior position." ¹

f. Ordination encourages institutionalization, bureaucracy and status quo. The offices and functions, positions and privileges tend to be loved and safeguarded at the expense of growth and progress.²

g. Finally, ordination sets aside the fact that the Holy Spirit is the source of all calling and gifting.

"Ultimate authority in the church resides in the Spirit of Christ, and cannot be distributed or delegated except by the sovereign Spirit himself. The church may not, whether by majority vote, ordination, the imposition of hands, or any combination thereof, delegate the authority that Christ has given to the church as a body."³

Warkentin quotes Leonard Goppelt who states that

"Among the disciples no office was to be allowed which would correspond to that of the political rulers (Mark 10:35, 44) or to the scribes (Matt 23:11. cf. vs 8-10). The one is constituted by right and power, the other by right and knowledge."⁴

She then continues: "Yet the church has always been inclined to slip into one pattern or the other."⁵

She concludes her book with the following words:

"When the Holy Spirit of God 'lays hands on' men

¹Ibid. pg. 161-163, 179.

²Ibid. pg. 166-168.

³Ibid. pg. 182.

⁴Goppelt, Leonard. Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1970. pg. 178.

⁵Warkentin, M. Ibid. pg. 185.

and women at conversion, this is their consecration, their call to serve their High Priest, Jesus Christ. They become members of the royal priesthood; they are the Levites of the New Covenant. God has made provision for their ordination at baptism. They need no other."¹

¹Ibid. pg. 188.

WHY ORDINATION?

So then, why ordination? This question appears in the minds of both clergy and laity for several contextual reasons:

1. The impressive divergence on such basic issues as those we have mentioned in this paper is perhaps the most serious one. When we wonder as to what ordination is, who should ordain, what happens at ordination, and even whether it has been beneficial for the church to ordain, it is not surprising that ordination itself comes into question.

The identity crisis in the ministry today is a corollary to this. Ordination defines the identity of a minister. He is a pastor, recognized (not lost in a crowd), set aside, appointed. And this recognition, setting aside, and appointing is what ordination does. To be unclear on what ordination is means uncertainty as to who the minister is.

3. Emphasis on the laity's role in the church in the recent past may have indirectly raised the question as well. The long overdue reminders of the priestly roles and responsibilities of every member and the indiscriminate granting of spiritual gifts to laity as well as to the ministry elicit queries about the need of ordination.

4. Finally, it is the mood of the day. Even as in some of the most respected vocations such as medicine and the legal professions, ministry becomes increasingly exposed to public scrutiny, judged more and more by contemporary cultural values

and concerns.

In this light, ordination appears suspect. Yet ordination needs neither defense nor apology. The words of critiques like Marjorie Warkentin should receive a hearing. But, even if human weakness and sin do affect and disfigure the most essential role in the church, this fact need not cause us to give up but rather urges us to reform. If one volume could be written (and this is questionable) against ordination, several could appear in favor of it. If some among us are the cause of the criticism, all of us will take it to heart and prove its needlessness in the future. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should continue ordaining its ministry and here is why.

1. Ordination, A Divine Wish

There is just no way around it. In several places in the Old and New Testaments, God calls those who are already His own for a special purpose. "Come," He says to His faithful servant Moses, (Ex 3:10) "I will send you to Pharoah that you may bring forth my people." Moses was a child of God, and he also had his earthly vocation, yet above all of that God interrupts, and yes, even disturbs him with another call.

Jesus "went upon the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons." (Mark 3:13-15) Jesus did not call everybody to follow Him daily on the road. He selected those whom He wished; He still does. For the church, Christ's wish is her command.

2. Ordination, An Act of Fairness

In addressing calls to special full time pastoral ministry, is Jesus playing favorites?

God is sovereign. He is not, nor can He be seduced or forced to act. He does what He wills, yet His wishes are not arbitrary. His being and acting are in harmony with His character of perfect justice and benevolence. It is important to keep in mind that perfect justice cannot only be equalitarian. Equality can be unjust. When, in the name of equality everybody is forced into the same mold, another norm of justice is transgressed, i.e. fairness. Equality must be fair in order to be just.

God's call to salvation follows the norm of equality alone. Every human is called to be His daughter or son. However, His call to service enriches equality with fairness. He cannot do otherwise and respect our individuality and uniqueness. We all have a right to be unique. It would not be fair for God to charge us with duties which would contradict our personal traits, our gifts, skills, or the place and role assigned to us by creation. He must be fair both to the church and to ministers.

3. Ordination, A Church's Need

Does ordination create two classes of Christians in the church community? Would Jesus have acted differently if He had had the "help" of our justice-and-equality-sensitive culture?¹

¹This is partially implied by those who consider Biblical statements to be determined in content, not just in form, by the culture of the time.

Are all differences ipso facto inequalities?¹

God does not create only two classes of christians but as many as there are classes of needs within His church family. Those needs are many and diverse. The wise leading of the Holy Spirit caters to these needs by enlisting human agents whom He enables to respond with care. Humans can reject the call to respond, yet while His callings are enablings, so also are His enablings His callings. Ordination is just such a call and reflects some special needs of the church.

a. Need of Leadership²

The church, as any other organization, needs leaders. The shepherd model described in Scripture responds in different ways to several needs within the church community:

- Example³ (1 Pet 5:2, 3; 1 Tim 4:12.) Christianity is a way of being and doing and not just a matter of knowing. If it were the latter, the communication of God's will in the Bible would be sufficient. A leader in the Christian sense of the word is the person who is watched in his being and doing. He leads by the way he imitates Christ. (1 Cor 11:1) Ordination marks off those who have such a burden.

- Dynamism (John 10:2-4). The primary need of the church is not

¹Is God guilty of discrimination for not creating unisex humans? See also McQuarrie op. cit. pg. 158.

²Büchsel, F. in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Vol II. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964. pg. 907.

³Bolich, G.G. Authority and the Church. Washington, D.C.: U.P.A., 1982. pg. 131.

its management but its movement. Leaders are dynamic people set aside to lead.

- Direction - Moving without direction means wandering.

Ministers are appointed not only to go but also to know where they are going. Decisions about the direction of the church are always made in reference to the goal and through guidance from the "control tower" above. (John 5:19, 20)

- Focal Point - Although the focal point is Jesus Christ, the church needs human undershepherds who call and lead to Christ. They are His ambassadors invested with full ecclesiastical authority.¹

b. Need of Watchmen²

The context in which the church is called to live and serve necessitates that God set watchmen upon her walls. (Isa 62:6,7)
Their roles are many:

- Information - While the church goes about her business and cares for her internal needs, ministry is called to observe, discern, and communicate conditions in society. When the members ask "Watchman, what of the night?" he should be able to respond. "They shall never be silent" says God. (Isa 62:6 and 21:11, 12)

- Protection - The call of a minister is not to entertain or tell stories. He is to be an alert watchman. In many ways, such a

¹Testimonies, Vol. 4 pg. 393, Acts of the Apostles, pg. 122, Testimonies, Vol. 3 pg. 433.

²Luther, M. "Church and Ministry" in Luther's Works. Vol. 39. Gritsch, E. ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970. pg. 155.

vocation is of ultimate importance and a very risky commission. First of all, he is vulnerable and exposed to his enemies. Secondly, he stands on the walls in order to accurately evaluate the conditions around the church. When a situation threatens life inside the wall, he must speak. (Eze 3:16-21) His words must affect the church so as to prepare her to meet the challenge. He holds in his hands not only the well being, but the very life of those who trust him (Heb 13:17). The ministry of a watchman is a full-time service with the highest responsibilities. Ordination is an event which marks the beginning of a life burdened with responsibility for others. (Paul considered his ordination as that beginning point.)¹

c. Need of the Word

God speaks to His people and to this world. But His voice is not the only one. The church is exposed to many "winds of doctrine" (Eph 4:14) and she very desperately needs representatives of God who are in tune with Him. Ordination to the ministry sets a person aside for the service of the Word. This service includes the following:

1) Bible study. Ministry of the Word means being at the disposition of that Word (Acts 6:4). A minister is a full-time Bible expert. He devotes himself to the Word. He is its servant. He lets the Word define his frame of mind and develop in him the heavenly culture.²

¹Gospels Workers, pg. 445.

²Gospel Workers, pp. 147-153.

2) Preaching. Authoritative preaching communicates reliably and relevantly the will of God to man.¹ Since "man cannot live by bread alone" but depends on "every word which proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4), to speak His word is a life and death issue.

3) Evangelism. The most acute need of the world and the most important responsibility of the church is to make the Word relevant to the present generation. Ordained ministers are full-time messengers bringing good news to human beings today and calling them to Jesus.

"Here is the supreme power with which pastors of the church, by whatever name they are called, should be invested - namely, to dare all boldly for the word of God, compelling all the virtue, glory, wisdom, and rank of the world to yield and obey its majesty; to command all from the highest to the lowest, trusting to its power to build up the house of Christ and overthrow the house of Satan; to feed the sheep and chase away the wolves; to instruct and exhort the docile, to accuse, rebuke and subdue the rebellious, and petulant, to bind and loose; in fine, if need be, to fire and fulminate, but all in the word of God.²

Ordination, the Vocation's Need

The call to a pastoral ministry is presented conclusively by the Word of God as the most awesome and formidable assignment. It is more than anyone could aspire for--more than anyone could

¹Ibid. pp. 153-155 and 31-35.

²Calvin, John. Calvin's Institutes. II Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970. pg. 395.

feel prepared for. "Who is sufficient for these things?" Indeed no one. Before we consider several reasons why ordination is necessary as part of the minister's job description, a brief excursus is in order here.

One school of thought in contemporary theology of ministry argues that competence is the most important prerequisite for ministry. Therefore, whoever meets the exigencies, passes the exams, proves successful-such a person can and should be ordained. As the unique position

"of the ministry in society at large has been increasingly threatened, there has been an attempt, understandable enough, to make it look as much as possible like some of the secular professions that seem to be competing with it. Christian ministers today are tempted to imitate the roles of more prestigious members of society, to become like social workers or clinical psychologists or even business executives."¹

The threat to ministry comes from two sides. First is what Gabriel Marcel calls the "functional view of man." One is what one does, and nothing more. It is not appropriate to ask, "Who are you?" for this is one's private affair. One should rather ask, "What do you do?" So what does a minister do? He preaches, baptizes, presides over the eucharist, teaches, counsels-that's all. Ministry is nothing more, nothing beyond its function in society. Secondly, the threat comes from the general trend of secularization.² Admittedly, ministry has its human and

¹Macquarrie, John. Ibid. pg. 156.

²Campbell, Denis M. Doctors, Lawyers, Ministers. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982. pg. 31.

professional aspects. Like other professions, it too must act with professional integrity, confidentiality, competency and dignity. Pastors are exposed to competition and professional jealousy, and they do not always uphold the professional standards as they should. But does all of this necessarily imply that ministry is only a function or only a profession? If it does, then graduation, promotion, installation, or even certification could replace ordination. Then the theology of ministry or a theology of ordination could be replaced with a sociology, psychology, or management of ministry without affecting it essentially.

The view that ministry is merely a profession can be challenged by an understanding of the vocational aspects of ministry.

1. Ministry, an incarnational vocation

"Vocation is more than a role; it is a life dedicated and a responsibility assumed."¹ Unlike most other professions, a minister cannot take off his vocation at the end of his working day because his work is identical with his life. There is no detachment possible. Full time, his actions and words re-present (make present again) the words and actions of Christ.

"Ambassadors for Christ have a solemn and important work, which rests upon some altogether too lightly. While Christ is the minister in the sanctuary above, He is also, through His delegates, the minister of His church on earth. He speaks to the people through chosen men, and

¹Williams, D.D. The Minister and the Care of Souls. New York: Harper & Row, 1961. pg. 103.

carries forward His work through them, as when in the days of His humiliation He moved visibly upon the earth."¹

At ordination ministers are dedicated-given up wholly-to God. "Before being sent forth as missionaries to the heathen world, these apostles were solemnly dedicated to God by fasting and prayer and laying on of hands."² Ordination signifies the giving up of self to the work of Christ.

"By laying on of hands the apostles signified the offering to God of the one they introduced into ministry... It is important to elevate the dignity of ministry before the people by the means of a solemn ceremony, and by the same token to warn the one who is ordained, that he does not belong to himself any more, but that he now is at the disposal of God and his church."³

2. Ministry, a soul vocation

"No one should play a role at the point where ultimate things are at stake," says D.D. Williams.⁴ The minister's trade is not to shape material as a craftsman, nor is he to minister primarily to man's physical wants. More than caring for the human body, as vitally important as that may be, he deals with the human soul, the very being of men and women.

"Functional man is depersonalized man, and his functions may eventually be taken over by machines without any difference in efficiency or even with increased efficiency. With little imagination one could visualize the advent of the machine in ministry!

¹Testimonies Vol. 4 pg. 393.

²Gospel Workers, pg. 441.

³Calvin, John. Institutions. IV Ibid. 3:16. (Translation mine.)

⁴Ibid.

But it would be in this matter of care of souls that the inadequacy of any merely functional view would be exposed."¹

At ordination the minister pledges his trustworthiness to care for the souls of his flock.

"Men are needed for this time who can understand the wants of the people and minister to their necessities. The faithful minister of Christ watches at every outpost to warn, to reprove, to counsel, to entreat, and to encourage his fellow men, laboring with the Spirit of God which worketh in him mightily, that he may present every man perfect in Christ. Such a man is acknowledged in heaven as a minister, treading in the footsteps of his great Exemplar."²

The importance of a pastoral ministry can be measured only if the worth of a soul is measurable.³

3. Ministry, the salvation vocation

Salvation of people is the primary and ever-present concern of ministry. A pastor will speak or be quiet, go forward or remain still, endure hardship and loss if such a course of action will save a soul.⁴ Even his search for truth will be for salvation's sake, not for the sake of truth alone. (John 16:12) While the medical profession functions to postpone death, the ministerial vocation leads humanity towards the victory over it. There is no second mile for a minister because his job description mentions no other limits than the ends of the earth.⁵

¹Mcquarrie, John. Ibid. pg. 170.

²Testimonies, Vol. 4 pg. 416.

³GW Pg. 184; 3 T pg. 188; 4 T pg. 261

⁴GW pg. 496.

⁵Testimonies, Vol. 9 pg. 32

Yet there is the question of credibility. Salvation is something that many claim and proclaim.

"God foresaw the difficulties that His servants would be called to meet; and in order that their work should be above challenge, He instructed the church by revelation to set them apart publicly to the work of the ministry. Their ordination was a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel. (1 Cor 4:1; Eph 3:8, 9; Col 1:25)."¹

4. Ministry, the Word vocation

Ordination sets the minister as the proclaimer and teacher of the Word. He becomes a bona fide mouthpiece of God.

"From Christ's ascension to the present day, men ordained of God, deriving their authority from Him have become teachers of the faith. Christ, the true shepherd, superintends His work through the instrumentality of these undershepherds. Thus the position of those who labor in word and doctrine becomes very important. In Christ's stead they beseech the people to be reconciled to God."²

Through ordination ministers enter the line of the faithful preachers of the past, thus perpetuating and safeguarding the truth. Their authority is anchored in Christ the head of the church and in those who within the church preceded them in the labor.

¹Gospel Workers, pp. 441, 442.

²Testimonies, Vol.4 pg. 393.

"He has ordained that there should be a succession of men who derive authority from the first teachers of the faith for the continual preaching of Christ and Him crucified. The Great Teacher has delegated power to His servants, who have 'this treasure in earthen vessels.' Christ will superintend the work of His ambassadors if they wait for His instructions and guidance."¹

¹Ibid. pg. 529.

IN SUMMARY

What is ordination? What is the word from God on this subject? After this cursory examination of Scripture, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the experience of the Christian Church through many centuries, several conclusions emerge:

1. God is the calling God. He calls every one out of this world to fill the empty places in His home. All of those who hear and return to Him are then called out of their own self-centered world to a priestly ministry and service to others. Ultimately, from among His royal priesthood He calls some to a special work of full-time service in His cause of redemption. This is a call to pastoral ministry. The initiative and the prerogative for the calling remain with Him.

2. Ordination is God's idea. It is He who at ordination MAKES of His disciples apostles - those whom he sends (Mark 3:14) as ambassadors. In His wisdom and care He APPOINTS watchmen who day and night watch, protect, and inform His Church family of the needs and dangers that surround it (Isa 62:6, 7).

Though ordination God AUTHORIZES ministers to teach and COMMISSIONS them to speak His words. By the same token, God EMPOWERS those whom He selects to administer the signs of His work of salvation and emblems of His atoning sacrifice.

3. Ordination happens in and for the Church, but only partially through the Church. God invites the Church to SET ASIDE those whom He has chosen and to DEDICATE them to Him by the

means of ordination. He urges RECOGNITION and RESPECT of those who are thus selected by Him. Ordination is the beginning of this special ministry.¹

4. God has delegated, not abandoned, the authority to ordain to His Church. He is still in control of it. This control is exercised in two ways. First, in looking down through the ages of time and in view of future needs, He planned and communicated His will. This will is given to us in the Scriptures. No culture, age, or need escaped His foresight. Like a good builder (Matt 16:18), Jesus counted the cost and foreknew the needs (Luke 14:28). At times He would rather reveal truths which were ahead of time than to leave His Church to wander or guess. In such cases, He instructed the writer to "shut up the words, and seal the book... until the right time comes." (Dan 12:4) We can trust His word.² No innovations in life or doctrine should wander away from the eternal Word. There is no duty or safety outside.

Secondly, God exercises His will in reference to ordination through the work of the third person of the trinity. He has inspired the Scriptures and now He leads individual lives within the Church. He calls to pastoral ministry and leads the Church to recognize those whom He has chosen. Yet, His present activity will never contradict His past words in the Bible because He is

¹Gospel Workers, pg. 445.

²This is the essential nature of prophecy-to bridge the time chasm between revelation and application.

eternal and because He is the Spirit of Truth, not the spirit of capriciousness or compromising.

5. Ministry has a human dimension. It carves out essential functions within the Church, and it must be accountable professionally for its performance. Proper training and expertise are absolutely essential. Graduation and certifications are important.

6. But ministry is also more than a profession or a function. Its nature cannot be fully or even essentially expressed only in terms of what a minister does, nor can it be measured in quantitative terms. The minister's care for the soul, the preaching of the Word of God, the eternal effects of the service-all point to a more serious and far reaching vocation. It occupies the whole of human life, and ordination is the event which claims human beings for God in service to humanity.

7. Ordination is also the hub of the church organization. "It was at the ordination of the Twelve that the first step was taken in the organization of the Church that after Christ's departure was to carry on His work on the earth."¹ These conclusions contain some important implications for the church today:

a. The church must bear in mind the fact that it has no authority over ordination. Its authority is only to ordain.

¹Acts of the Apostles, pg. 18. See also Desire of Ages, pg. 296.

b. The call to ordination is not the function of the Church or of any individual, but of God Himself.

8. Ordained ministers are due respect and support on several grounds:

- a. Because they discharge their duties diligently and professionally. (1 Tim 5:17)
- b. Because pastoral ministry is the most important vocation "to which human beings had ever been called, second only to Christ Himself."¹
- c. Because, "to neglect or despise those whom God has appointed to bear the responsibility of leadership in connection with advancement of the truth, is to reject the means that He has ordained for the help, encouragement, and strength of His people."²

9. Since the function of theology is to relate the will of God to the contemporary situation, and not the contemporary culture to the will of God, one must proceed with great caution in addressing the issues raised by today's culture in the matter of ordination. Of particular importance are the questions of equality and the relevance of the Bible raised by contemporary society.

a. Is the placing of limits upon who may be ordained unjust? God's call to ministry is not unjust if it appears selective. His discernment and consistency may lead Him to treat human beings differently. He has done it before, yet "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25) Simple equalitarianism enforced indiscriminately is a form of tyranny.

¹Gospel Workers, pg. 445.

²Ibid. pg. 444.

God's justice is not only equalitarian, but it is fair as well.

b. One must carefully decide whether to reach his conclusions by means of critical thinking or on the basis of emotions or preferences.¹ Faithfulness to God's word may appear to be blind and heartless. Many compromises with doing God's will are prompted by love, yet such compromises are no less dangerous (Rev 2:10).

c. What norms should be used as a basis of decision on ordination? The opinions of the majority of devote believers? The plethora of polls, statistics, and sociological studies serve as a base for normativeness in some circles, even in theological discussions and decisions. Yet it should be kept in mind that

-"If theology bears the traces of an ideology, it is equally true that every sociology has its inbuilt theology or possibly atheology, that is to say, its implicit value system in the light of which it selects and evaluates its facts."²

The one significant difference between theology and sociology is the source of data.³

It is not clear how one should move from a descriptive

¹Macquarrie, J. Ibid. pg. 190.

²Ibid.

³Ibid. pg. 191. "In the matter which we are presently considering," says Macquarrie, "it does seem to me that some of those who have been most forward in criticizing the tradition on the grounds of its cultural bias have themselves been operating in terms of an uncriticized secular ideology, characterized by equalitarianism, relativism, immanentism and sometimes too the alleged need for confrontation-characteristics which are all very questionable from a Christian point of view."

study of data to a prescriptive application. Is it prudent to consider a majority opinion normative in doctrine and policy?¹

d. What should be the role of the majority in deciding what God has said? SDA theology takes the Word as primary and it has always elevated the primacy of His Word above the opinions of the majority. No doctrine or practice is based on what God "might have" said or "should have" said. Seventh-day Adventists remain faithful to the Sabbath because God has said so. The fact that God never said not to observe Sunday is not a sufficient reason to observe it, and even less to transgress the Sabbath. God's explicit statements are mandatory. God's silence should never be a basis for doctrine or practice.

e. But words are not the only source of authority. God's actions in history "speak" even louder. His actions illumine His words and vice versa. He not only commanded that the Sabbath be observed but He also rested Himself. In reference to ordination, He stated some things and did or did not do other things. His saying and doing do not conflict.

In our effort to listen to the contemporary voices and challenges, we the church obey and imitate our Master voluntarily. He is ready to ask, "Do you also wish to go away?" But our answer must be, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:67, 68).

¹Ibid. pg. 192. "But we must remember too that the church is not a political institution, and truth is not decided by majority votes."